

Harbor Town Crime Evaluation & Report: Observations & Recommendations

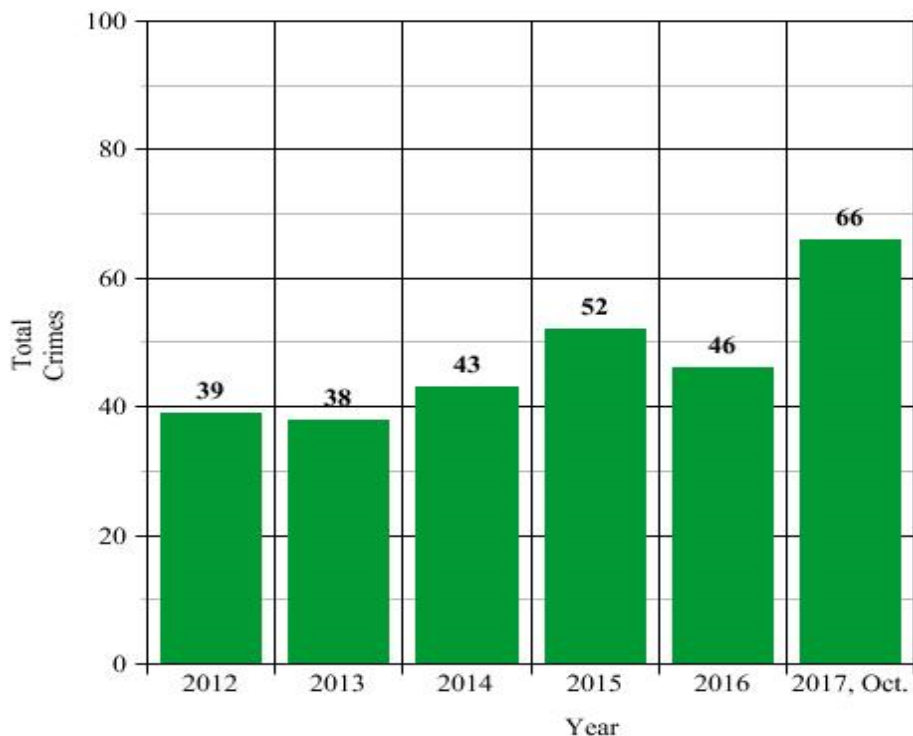
by Greg Little (Harbor Town Resident)

With input from sub-committee of the Harbor Town Task Force on Crime & Safety
November 2017

Is Reported Crime in Harbor Town Increasing?

To evaluate whether reported crime in Harbor Town is increasing, crime reports were gathered from the *Memphis Daily News Crime Report* website from 2012 to present. The 2017 data is incomplete and only includes reports from January 1 to October 27. Crimes reported only within the Harbor Town limits were included in the study. Other crime reports were made over these years in the city parks and parking areas within Greenbelt Park, which are not included in the results below. In addition, 17 crimes reported in 2017 were domestic crime reports from the same location over a 2-day period and were collapsed into one crime. The graph below shows the results. In summary, reported crime in Harbor Town was relatively stable from 2012 through 2014 and increase in crime reports since then. The year end 2017 is incomplete and may increase over the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

Harbor Town Reported Crimes 2012-2017



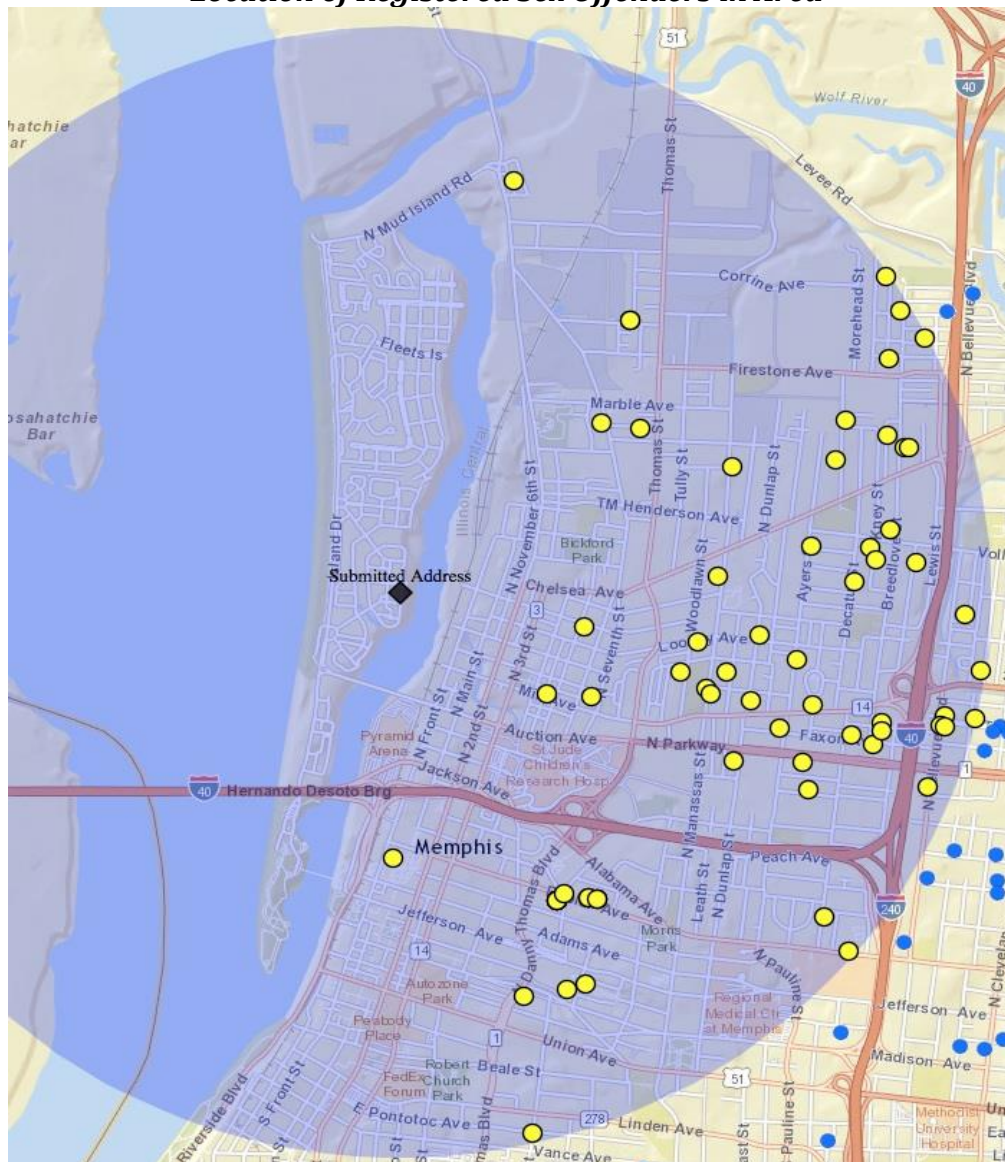
Observations from the Crime Reports and Greg Little

1. No Neighborhood is Truly Crime-Free. There is no such thing as a completely crime-free neighborhood. Despite what is often claimed, both Germantown and Collierville have crime. For example, using the same *Memphis Daily News Crime Report* database, reported crimes in one square mile of Germantown centering on this writer's office on Exeter Rd. in central Germantown covering the first 10 months of 2017, the results showed 121 reported crimes in that portion of Germantown. Of those, nearly 40 were for assault with several rape cases and others were for burglary, home and auto theft. By

contrast, Harbor Town is as safe as Germantown and Harbor Town shows minimal crimes of violence (e.g., assault).

2. Type of Crimes in Harbor Town. The vast majority of crime reports in Harbor Town are those of simple theft, the most common being items stolen from parked automobiles. The reports do not indicate a single incident where a car window was broken to gain access. Discussions with victims make it apparent that the typical crime occurs when an unlocked car is opened by a thief. It needs to be clear to residents that Harbor Town has very few incidents of assault or violence and those few that do occur appear to be the result of domestic violence. We are surrounded by high crime areas and it is also worth noting that the present writer made checks of the Tennessee Sex Offender Database before moving to Harbor Town and again for this report. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) maintains a registry showing the location of all registered sex offenders and no sex offenders are shown as residing on Mud Island. The TBI location database of Registered Sex Offenders is shown in the figure below.

***Tennessee Bureau of Investigation
Location of Registered Sex Offenders in Area***



3. Greenbelt Park & Its Parking Lots. There continue to be large numbers of crime reports made in the entire Greenbelt area. When the park's parking lots were closed off, it was observed that many people who normally go to the park area at night and in the early morning, would park in the area around the River Hall, Tugs, the street adjacent to the Arbors, and Paulettes. The present author walked almost every morning at 3 a.m. for nearly two years in Harbor Town and the Greenbelt Park. The area of the River Inn was walked by each morning and two attempted car theft incidents were observed and reported to the police. In each incident the individuals attempting to enter the automobiles ran away immediately when they were seen. In one case the perpetrator was using a "slim-jim" to attempt to unlock a parked truck. Such car-opening devices are easily purchased and other methods to unlock automobiles are widely available and can be viewed on *You Tube*.

4. Thefts From The Arbor's Area. The amount of traffic entering Harbor Town and going East on Harbor Edge Drive at 3-4 a.m. is unusually high for that time. This is an area many have cited as having numerous thefts from the interior of automobiles. This may be partially due to outsiders parking around the River Hall area. In this area there are large numbers of automobiles parked and it is seen by certain types of criminals as a ripe area to routinely check for "opportunities."

5. River Landing Incidents. The rash of incidents reported on River Landing are possibly due to outsiders walking into Harbor Town through the openings adjacent to River Breeze Drive. Though there are two openings for golf carts, the entire landscaped area is easily accessible to walk through.

6. Criminal Type Targeting Harbor Town. There are few burglaries involving breaking and entering in Harbor Town, which is likely due to many homes having alarm systems and the relative density of homes. The primary type of criminal working the area is young and opportunistic looking for opportunities to steal. Some will walk down the street and check each car that is passed to see if it is unlocked and if it is, it will be quickly rummaged through and anything of value will be removed. If a garage door opener is found it will be taken and the offender will go to the back and try it out. The garage will be entered and again, anything of value will be taken. These criminals usually have a car that is often driven slowly behind them to receive stolen merchandise. Some of these individuals will park their car and walk a street and return to their car with stolen goods.

7. What These Criminals Are Seeking. In general, they are looking for anything that can yield a quick sale: Guns, ammunition, cell phones, i-pods, computers, and anything small that can be easily resold. They will quickly go through a car and collect anything of value such as cash, wallets, purses, and packages.

8. Are They Dangerous? In general, few of these opportunistic criminals will be armed with weapons. To many of them, getting caught by the police is seen as only a hassle and an inconvenience—the cost of doing their business. When arrested, they are typically released within hours. Having a weapon, however, changes the situation and they would face more serious charges. Thus, they are almost always unarmed. However, if confronted by residents they can become belligerent and would likely resist being detained. In addition, citizens detaining individuals on the street may risk legal consequences.

9. Time Frame of Harbor Town Crime. Most reported crime in Harbor Town occurs in the night. The largest cluster of reports from 2017 center on Sunday night from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. The majority of all reported crimes in the community occur on Sunday through Thursday nights. These are nights preceding workdays when most residents are sleeping. There are no reports that have been found of packages that have been left for delivery that were stolen from porches, but verbal communications from a few residents indicate that this has happened.

10. Outside Workers in Harbor Town. Memphis and Shelby County have approximately ten thousand individuals on probation and parole. All of these individuals need work opportunities, and as a society that gives repeated “second chances,” it is important that citizens support such efforts. Many of these individuals gravitate to jobs involving home repair, roofing, painting, yardwork, and similar occupations. This writer personally came to know thousands of burglars and others who committed different crimes. One somewhat famous serial burglar (who specialized in Germantown) worked as a pest control worker who used the job to identify targets. In essence, we have some convicted and active offenders entering the community every day for lawful work. It is not feasible to screen all of these individuals but it’s important to understand that some of these individuals are assessing the community for targets. Paradoxically, the presence of so many workers in Harbor Town during the day probably decreases the chances of daytime burglary.

11. The object is deterrence. Many residents want offenders apprehended and charged. While that is desirable, it is not effective at eliminating the type of crime the community experiences. Crime experts who work with neighborhoods always stress that a neighborhood should seek to deter crime. That means becoming an area that is not seen as an easy target.

Recommendations

Short term solutions are steps that can be immediately taken to reduce crime events. As we approach the holiday season with many delivery packages left on porches, this type of crime is highly likely to escalate. It is also likely that theft from parked automobiles will continue to escalate. These possibilities can be reduced by taking some serious and quick moves. Long term recommendations involve more time to discuss, plan, and implement.

Short Term—Immediate Action—Recommendations

1. Hire security service for the Thanksgiving and Christmas season: November 24-December 29.

A security service with three (3) automobiles with caution lights flashing continuously should be employed and stationed at the three automobile entrances to Harbor Town during the Christmas season (about 36 days). Ideally these individuals would be off-duty police or deputies or at a minimum unarmed security. These should be stationed at the three entrances from approximately 10 pm until 5 am and place a temporary large sign at each spot by the security vehicle. The sign should essentially state: *Harbor Town is a Private Community. All Visitors Please Check In.*

The security personnel need to follow a set script to avoid confrontations. People driving in who say they are residents should simply be smiled at and waved by. A “visitor” who stops should be told: *“We are just checking with visitors. Are you here to visit someone or just drive through and look at the lights?”* Usually that will be the total conversation and most visitors should be told, *“Okay, enjoy the lights.”* Visitors who press for more information should be told: *“Harbor Town’s streets and parks are private. There are no public areas other than the stores, hotel, and restaurant area.”*

The personnel should record the license plate numbers of anyone who appears suspicious or is overly confrontive. The objective of this is to send a visible message to prospective criminals and will likely cause anyone looking for crime opportunity to simply drive away and make it clear to everyone that the neighborhood is private.

2. Place temporary signs at each entrance. Harbor Town is an open community but also a private community. It is very likely that the vast majority of non-residents are unaware of this. While the necessity of permanent new signs is addressed in the long-term recommendations, it is necessary to

make temporary signs that should be placed in visible spots at all main entrances during the 36 days security personnel are on duty. These signs need to essentially state: *“Harbor Town is a private community: All streets and parks are for residents and their guests. No Trespassing.”* A sample from another neighborhood similar to Harbor Town is below.



3. Create Neighborhood Watch Zones in Areas Where Residents Are Amenable. While there are some areas in Harbor Town where interest in Neighborhood Watch is negligible, there are some areas where it is feasible. Interested sectors of the neighborhood should be encouraged to form such groups. This can be facilitated by a regular newsletter. Everyone knows that getting to know one’s neighbors and their routines is a key to such programs. In addition, there is an “Citizens Alert” app for smart phones that groups of residents can be encouraged to utilize.

4. Fix Inoperable Lights and Ensure Residents turn ON their lights. Many residents have mentioned that some city street lights are not operating. Lighting deters the type of crime that Harbor Town experiences. Residents are encouraged to turn on their porch lights, utilize landscape lighting, and use garage lighting (motion and or photosensing LED lights). It is observed that most residents do not turn on any outside lighting.

5. Provide Residents Information—Written Newsletter. It is essential to routinely notify all residents of efforts to reduce crime and provide them with strategies and information. The newsletter does not need to be extensive. The initial one could be an 11 x 8 piece of paper folded to make 4 pages. If the recommendations are followed it is necessary to issue the first one before the Christmas season to notify residents what will happen. Residents need to be reminded to keep car doors locked, but more importantly, to keep anything of value out of their automobile. They also need to be told of the importance of being watchful, having an alarm system, neighborhood watch, and other issues. While email is a great option for quick communication and should continue, the simple fact is that too many residents don’t receive or read the emails.

Long Term Recommendations

Harbor Town has four critical access points. One long-term solution that has worked in many communities is the placement of camera systems that film or photograph all cars that enter and leave. When this is done, it does reduce crime to some extent. One working group is investigating the costs and issues. Gating/fencing the entire community might be ideal in some ways, but it would not reduce crime to zero. And it’s likely some residents would experience problems with the gates. Too many outsiders enter during the daytime for work and access codes are easily passed around. In addition, there are two walkthroughs on the far north end of Harbor Town. These can be gated, but additional fencing would be required there. Completely gating Harbor Town would be an expensive option that would have some, but limited, effect, however, this solution is favored by many. The costs and logistics are a determining factor.

1. Install Video/Camera Surveillance at Each Entrance. This is perhaps the most efficient long-term strategy a large neighborhood like Harbor Town can make. The cameras must be visible and signage must be employed. The ideal system to use is the **Sky Cop** system with cameras located at each entrance into the community and at several other key areas. This is likely the most cost-effective investment the community could make and would very likely reduce crime significantly.

2. New, More Visible, Permanent Signs Need to Be Placed at Key Points. All three automobile entrances need new signs that are visible and state that Harbor Town is a private community with private streets and private parks. It is necessary that the words “**no trespassing**” be on the signs. All parks in the community should have signs indicating that, “**This park is for the use of residents and their guests. No trespassing.**”

3. Close and Fence the Entire Walkthrough on the North End. The walkthrough into Harbor Town on the north end is a problem area and provides easy and covert access to those seeking to go through automobiles parked in that area. They should be fenced off and closed.

4. Urge Residents to Install Burglar Alarm Systems in Their Homes and Display Signs. Harbor Town has few residential burglaries. But alarm systems provide a genuine sense of safety and are very effective at deterring criminals. Also, in the interest of proactive crime prevention, it has been demonstrated that, the more homes in a given neighborhood that have burglar alarm systems, the lower the subsequent number of burglaries. A widely reported 2008 doctoral dissertation from Rutgers University (Lee, 2008) studied the relationship between burglary reports and installations of alarm systems over a 5-year period in a large, residential, urban area of New Jersey. The study conclusively showed that as the number of home alarm systems increased, burglary decreased. The study showed an almost perfect relationship between the two variables. An earlier study conducted in 1994, interviewed hundreds of convicted burglars and found that evidence of an alarm system in a home reduced the probability of subsequent burglary by over 86%. The presence of small yard signs indicating the presence of an alarm system is important. The neighborhood newsletter can stress this fact.

5. Communicate With Apartment Dwellers. In a neighborhood where so many people work, it is difficult to gain the attention of some individuals. The residents of the apartments need to hear that their cars are vulnerable and the steps they should take. Routinely they should be told that items of value should never be left in their cars. In addition, they should be encouraged to have relatively inexpensive alarm systems placed in their dwelling. Harbor Town could even arrange for a discounted service to be made available. The newsletter makes this idea feasible.

6. Encourage the Police to Place Marked Cars in the Neighborhood. Unmanned police cars stationed at different locations and at random times tend to make those looking for opportunities to steal to simply drive away. This action requires cooperation from an overburdened police department. However, they do have many cars that are not being used routinely. Our political powers can facilitate this.

Reference: Lee, S. (2008) The impact of home burglar alarm systems on residential burglaries. Dissertation: Rutgers University, Department of Criminal Justice.

Note: This is a revised and condensed version of a larger, preliminary report. Greg Little is a Harbor Town resident and criminal justice consultant.